

# Once upon a time in the Intensive Care Unit

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The first few days after birth is an important time when babies learn to recognize the sound of their parents' voice and the parents in turn bond with their children. However, the separation between parents and newborns admitted to the intensive care unit can be very difficult and can disrupt the early development of this relationship.

Jan Lariviere, a nurse in the neonatal clinic and the Neonatal [Intensive Care Unit](#) (NICU) at The Montreal Children's Hospital (MCH) of the MUHC led an innovative research project that suggests reading to [newborns](#) in the NICU greatly lends normalcy and allows [parents](#) to feel closer to their babies during this difficult period. The results are published in the latest edition of the *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*.

"The objective of the study, which involved 120 families, was to determine whether reading helped strengthen the bond between parents and their babies, and whether this motivated parents to continue reading at home," said Lariviere, principal investigator of the study.

"Alyssia was in an incubator in the middle of the room, with tubes and all sorts of things going on around her. I felt destabilized and powerless, not knowing how to make contact with my daughter," said Mélissa Asselin, mother of Alyssia Barrière, now five years old, who was born with pulmonary hypertension. "Reading gave us a way to stay close. I couldn't talk to her or touch her, but she heard the sound of my voice. That simple activity helped me get through the situation, and I have

beautiful memories of the experience."

Nearly 70% of parents in the study reported that reading made them feel closer to their [babies](#). Most said they developed a feeling of intimacy and normalcy, as well as feeling more in control of the situation as parents. In addition, the parents who read to their child in the NICU were three times as likely to continue this practice at home. "As health professionals, we must give parents the tools they need to cope with the situation," noted Lariviere. "Reading should become an essential tool in NICUs and follow-up clinics."

"This study, the first of its kind, focused on the effects of reading to newborns in the NICU," said Dr. Janet Rennick, co-author of the study, Nurse Scientist at the MCH and Assistant Professor in the School of Nursing and Department of Pediatrics, McGill University. "We plan to continue our research efforts over the coming years to evaluate the long-term effects of nursing interventions on the development of critically ill children."

Provided by McGill University Health Centre

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